

CHAPTER 1

Sparta

Reconstructing History from Secrecy, Lies and Myth

Anton Powell

To understand Sparta involves one of the most fruitful, and difficult, challenges in the study of the ancient world. The techniques which are developed in the process are intensely relevant also to the modern world. They address the question ‘How to understand a secretive foreign state, or organization, an unfamiliar culture skilled in the orchestration of propaganda, visual images and lies?’ More than any other, Sparta was the state which other Greeks, of the classical period and later, admired. That Sparta had achieved something of unique importance is clear to us from two facts. Faced with an uncountably large invasion force led by Persia, in 480, those Greek states which resisted chose to do so under the leadership of Sparta, and of Sparta alone. Seventy-five years after that triumphant resistance, Sparta had crushed a new challenger. She had defeated the Athenian empire. Whether to obliterate Athens itself was, in 404, an administrative decision for Sparta’s leading men to take at their leisure. Sparta at that point held in her hand the future of Greek history. She had the power to abolish Athens, the capital of Greek literacy, of reflection – and of historical writing. From Sparta’s decision to spare the city flowed the survival of those written records which allowed posterity, us, to write the history of Greece, and of Sparta herself. Sparta, in short, was classical Greece’s superpower: the military patron – without knowing, or wishing, it – of what would become western civilization.

The superpower, even in its moments of victory, was not content. In the decade after her conquest of Athens, Sparta twice attempted to conquer the Persian Empire. Yet Sparta was – in citizen population – tiny, small even by the standards of a Greek *polis*. Its citizens, ‘Spartiates’, were the inhabitants of a few southern-Greek villages by the

River Eurotas in Laconia. These men, evidently of extraordinary morale, aimed to defeat an empire which stretched from the eastern Mediterranean coast (today's western Turkey) to Egypt, Afghanistan and the borders of India. Some thirty Spartan officers under king Agesilaos were considered sufficient to command the second, more formal, invasion of Persian territory, in 396. Sparta's confidence, and the culture which generated it, will be one of the themes of this book. Yet, less than thirty years later, Sparta's own hegemony suddenly ended. Beaten in 371 at Leuktra by another Greek army, that of Thebes, Sparta lost about half of her domestic territory, and thereafter her power was confined to the Peloponnese. For the rest of Antiquity, Sparta was never more than a scheming imitator of her former self.

1.1 Ancient – and Modern – Views of Sparta

These extremes of power and weakness have led to deeply diverse images of Sparta. In Sparta's imperious days of the fifth century, her power was taken for granted by other Greeks. Our two best sources for that period, Herodotos and Thucydides, nowhere explain at length to what Sparta owed her power. Both those writers make extraordinary, though brief, claims about the extreme stability of Sparta's form of government, and way of life. According to Thucydides (writing around 400 BC), Sparta had been a well-run, stable *polis* for 'slightly more than 400 years, approximately' (1.18.1; compare Hdt. 1.65). This internal stability, with its avoidance of turbulent in-fighting, of the *stasis* which plagued so many Greek cities, was, Thucydides believed, the main reason why Sparta was free to direct its energies outwards, towards the control of others. Herodotos, and even sometimes the austere Thucydides, tell colourful anecdotes to Sparta's credit. It is from Herodotos, for example, that we have the story of Spartan warriors calmly combing their hair in the face of death at Thermopylai (7.208). Thucydides, an Athenian who campaigned as a general against Sparta, could make a sweeping negative judgement of Sparta's military qualities. He writes about the Peloponnesian War (431–404), that the Spartans 'proved to be in many ways the most convenient enemies that the Athenians could have had' (8.96.5). But to interpret such negativity we need to remember why writers write. They do not write in order to state only the obvious; they privilege paradox and novelty and, as is very plain in Thucydides' case, seek to correct public opinion. Thucydides was writing for an initial readership which knew that Sparta had defeated Athens (or was likely soon to do so). He wrote to *adjust* public opinion – and that opinion almost certainly was that Sparta had a superlative military machine, made possible by an extraordinary, if ruthless, political system at home.

Much of Spartan history is constructed from passing remarks and hints in Herodotos and Thucydides. Such comment was far easier for contemporary Greeks to interpret than it is for ourselves. Yet since 1970 Spartan studies have been refounded and have developed more rapidly, perhaps, than ever before. This has been made possible above all by the demonstration of how much information about Sparta could be extracted, ingeniously and convincingly, from the scattered remarks of Thucydides. The person who performed that demonstration was Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, in his book *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (1972). Following his work, scholars have looked with new and fruitful optimism for significant traces of Spartan reality not only in Thucydides but also in Herodotos,

Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, and many other writers. Even where Sparta is not named, ancient ideas often turn out to be Sparta-shaped. When in 431/0 Perikles issued his enduring eulogy of Athens (as recorded, and no doubt reshaped, by his Athenian colleague Thucydides), Sparta is present as a defining shadow. Perikles boasts that Athens is an open city, unlike – he says – others (unnamed) who drive out foreigners to hide their military secrets: he means Sparta (Th.2.39.1). Athens is *an* education for Greece, says Perikles (Th.2.41.1). He admits, by implication, that *the* famous education was that of Sparta, where – most unusually – education for citizen boys was provided by the state, with famous and extraordinary results. At the height of Sparta's power, after her conquest of Athens, one question became too clear and important to be ignored. Two Athenians, Kritias and Xenophon, wrote short works to explain Sparta's unique success. The question, as Xenophon posed it in the first sentence of his *Constitution of the Spartans* (*Lak. Pol.* 1.1.), defined ideas about Sparta, both in Antiquity and often today: 'I reflected on the startling fact that the population of Sparta is among the smallest in Greece and yet it has become the most powerful and famous state of all Greece.' To explain that unique achievement, Xenophon's text dwells on, no doubt exaggerates, what was different, or unique, about life within Sparta: how did Sparta form its men and (Xenophon rightly insists) its women? For human character – the Spartans had understood – was plastic. Culture was artificial, ingrained not inborn: education mattered and especially childhood education, *paideia* (the word attributed to Perikles in the Funeral Speech). Analysts influenced by Xenophon have tended to seek to explain Spartan *success*.

The last years of Sparta's hegemony, the 380s and 370s, saw a sharp decline in the state's moral reputation. Spartan officers, employing their city's traditional sense of military opportunity (see this volume, Chapter 11), seized control of Thebes in peacetime (382), and attempted as much against Peiraieus, the port of Athens (378). Such unprovoked aggression severely disappointed even Xenophon, himself a friend and client of a Spartan king, Agesilaos. In a late chapter (14) of the *Lak. Pol.* Xenophon abruptly diverges from the eulogy in earlier chapters, and virtually rants against Spartan moral decadence in his own day. Plato in both of his long, theoretical texts describing imaginary, ideal city-states, gives polarized images of Sparta. Many aspects of Spartan life, such as state education and the limiting of personal wealth, are clearly a source of positive inspiration in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. In other ways, these same texts criticize Sparta for falling short of her own ideals, for disobeying her own apparent logic – as, for example, in making girls do aggressive exercises but not letting women become soldiers. Plato lived through Sparta's widest hegemony, then through her loss of moral reputation, then her military humiliation. The deep structure of his political works is shaped by Sparta, in ways which his modern commentators, themselves often unfamiliar with Spartan history, have frequently missed. Clearer, and so more influential today, are the signs of his own disappointment, as Spartans, a community which *could* have done so much, morally, proved too interested in private wealth. On such matters, like Xenophon in the anomalous chapter 14 of the *Lak. Pol.*, Plato may even have been preaching to the Spartans of his own day.

Aristotle, Plato's pupil, lived all his adult life in the period following Sparta's fall. His attitude towards Sparta is less conflicted than Plato's. He argues explicitly in the *Politics* against using Sparta as an ideal. Intimately contradicting his former master, he dwells on what he sees as reasons for Sparta's failure. Rather than advocating more influence for

women, Aristotle argues that Spartan women in several ways were over-assertive and had been responsible for Sparta's decline. Women, for Aristotle, are implicated in Sparta's drift away from official egalitarianism and towards the concentration of wealth in dangerously few hands. Now, Aristotle is – deservedly – of immense influence in forming modern views of Sparta, even though few follow the spirit of his incriminatory remarks about women. His work has tended to encourage in modern scholars the opposite question to that posed by Xenophon: not 'Why did Sparta succeed?', but 'Why did she fail?' However, if we ask why Aristotle made his anti-Spartan arguments with such energy, we may suspect that he needed to counter a still-powerful view in the mid fourth century that Sparta had *not* failed, even that a military comeback by Sparta was possible.

The view that Sparta in the classical period had been, overall, a success was held by sentimental, but still influential, writers of the post-classical period. For philosophers, who also tended to be professional teachers, Sparta fascinated by the example of what education could achieve, if applied widely, rigorously and from an early age. Also, as mainland Greece lost its power and self-confidence, first under Macedonian conquest from the age of Philip and Alexander, then under Roman rule, the idea of bygone Sparta – like that of bygone Athens – provided consolation and a prop to Greek morale.

Plutarch, whose *Life of Sparta's* mythical founder Lykourgos is now the easiest ancient text to use – and *abuse* – to gain a view of life within Sparta, wrote this 'biography' as part of a grand project of recounting the lives of eminent Greeks and Romans in pairs and in parallel. We sense his anxious desire to elevate the Greek past to the rank of the Roman present. In his *Perikles* (ch. 12) he writes that surviving Greek temples are, in his day (the early 2nd century AD), the *only* (obvious) proof that Greek achievement once matched that of Rome; indeed, he claims, Greek architectural splendour excelled that of Rome until the end of the Roman Republic (*Comparison of Perikles and Fabius Maximus*, 3). Bygone Sparta, for Plutarch, was a necessary part of Greece's moral heritage. The enthusiastically positive picture of Sparta given in the *Lykourgos* was profoundly influential in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, modern scholarship has reduced Plutarch's credit in matters Spartan. Respect for his intellect has, if anything, grown in recent years, but alongside that has developed an awareness not only of his patriotic concerns but also of how remote he was from the events he described, how susceptible he was to myth-making about the Spartan past. He visited Sparta, where an enthusiastically exaggerated re-enactment of past glories was in full swing. 'I saw boys whipped to death' (he writes, unambiguously: *Lykourgos*, 18), a proof of local heroism.

With ancient writers encouraging extreme attitudes towards Sparta, whether negative or positive, it is profoundly tempting for modern observers to tend themselves towards one or the other pole. Sometimes the poles subtly reinforce each other. Spartans themselves encouraged the view that they were simple soldiers, ignorant in many matters, relying more on noble practice than on complex thought (e.g. Hdt.3.46, Thuc.1.86.1, Xen.*Lak. Pol.*11.7). In a different spirit Thucydides, as we have seen, wrote of Spartan high military incompetence. Many scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries vigorously condemned Spartan 'folly', 'arrogant stupidity', disastrous ineptitude, 'characteristic ...lack of foresight'. One eminent historian (in 1981) even suggested that there may never have been such a thing as 'a very intelligent Spartan'. Such was, until recently, almost an orthodoxy (for a brief anthology, see Powell (2016, 102), leaving an unsolved puzzle: How could such people, so stupid and so few, dominate Greece for

some 150 years – and defeat the far more numerous and supposedly far more intelligent Athenians? A more modern and fruitful approach, useful whether in international politics or with a neighbour in the street, is to look for the logic even, and indeed especially, of people we may not like. And it is important to note that few modern scholars actually *like* the Spartans.

In other ways too, understanding Sparta involves combining thoughts and feelings which do not go easily together. In the fifth century *both* Sparta and Athens show patterns of aggressive expansion, against the interests of the other (see this volume, Chapter 11). Modern scholars, however, have tended to align morally, seeing *either* blameworthy Athenian expansion *or* blameworthy Spartan aggression. (The best-known representatives of these conflicting tendencies are, respectively, E. Badian (1993), and G.E.M. de Ste. Croix (1972).) Again, how typically Greek was Sparta? Was she – as Xenophon insisted – a unique exception to Greek norms? Stephen Hodkinson well shows ((2009b) and this volume, Chapter 2) that much about Sparta was remarkably normal by Greek standards. Should we then go further and completely normalize Sparta? That might leave Sparta's unique power inexplicable. Likewise, we may be tempted to see Sparta overall as a success or a failure, and in the process to privilege one set of information, one sort of explanation, to the detriment of another. In reality, Sparta – at least in her own terms – was *both* a unique success and a sad failure depending on the period studied, or the *aspect* studied within a single period. To accept such an overall view may seem simple in the abstract. But to apply it in detail to the study of Sparta may be far harder. Our psychology may resist such things, as when we see different patterns in a Maltese Cross. Faced with this (see image below),



at a single moment we focus either on the white segments or the black arms: our brains cannot easily manage both simultaneously. Yet however we focus predominantly, whether on the aggression Sparta suffered or committed, on her normality or her uniqueness as a Greek community, on her success or her failure, we should, as with the Maltese Cross, never forget that the other aspect exists.

1.2 Secrecy, Lies and Detailed Stories

Thucydides, the most astute historian of Antiquity, admitted his problem. It was impossible to know certain military details about the Spartans ‘because of the secrecy of their state’ (5.68.2). This recalls Perikles’ implication, reported by Thucydides, that Sparta used formal expulsions of other Greeks (*xenēlasiai*) to hide military secrets, and relied in

military matters on ‘training and acts of deception’ (2.39.1). But in the former passage Thucydides speaks in his own voice: he clearly suggests that the very structure of Spartan politics and community life was normally subject to concealment. Now, such concealment requires an effort, and is likely therefore to be done for a conscious and compelling reason. For Perikles, who was very likely right, that reason was military. Sparta was surrounded and greatly outnumbered by potential enemies. Even in her homeland, Sparta’s citizen population was dwarfed by that of the helots, Greek-speakers, natives of the region, whose status was akin to that of slaves. Sparta exceeded other Greek states, according to Thucydides, in the number (or, perhaps, proportion) formed by this unfree population (8.40.2 and see Figueira, this work, Chapter 22). Here was always the potential for internal war, between helot and master. Modern societies, including democratic ones, recognize the close relation between war and intense secrecy. In the Britain of World War II, military research was described as ‘hush, hush’. The population was instructed to ‘Be like dad. Keep mum!’ [i.e., Don’t talk]. Warning posters showed housewives tempted to talk about where their male relatives were serving as soldiers; behind them in the food queue was pictured, ears pricked, Adolf Hitler.

Modern studies of Sparta readily follow Thucydides in admitting that Spartan secrecy existed, and that it poses problems for the historian. Scholars have, however, been far less ready to confront another, kindred, form of behaviour attributed to Sparta on good, contemporary authority: organized lying. Thucydides recounts how the Spartan authorities in the 420s identified and removed the most spirited and impressive helots, those who might one day become formidable as leaders of a revolution. An official announcement was made. Those helots who had distinguished themselves on Sparta’s behalf in her recent wars should come forward, so that Sparta could reward them with freedom. Some 2000 were duly selected. They were allowed to celebrate conspicuously in public. And Sparta then secretly killed them all: ‘No one knew how each of them died’, writes Thucydides (4.80.2–4). But for lying by Spartans, Xenophon, Sparta’s ally and partisan, is our most telling source. He describes, without disapproval, how Spartan military commanders reacted to the news that the Spartan navy, elsewhere, had suffered a crushing defeat (*Hell.* 1.6.36–7, 4.3.13–14). In 406 (after the defeat at Arginousai), and in 394 (after that of Knidos), the bad tidings were deliberately inverted, and a Spartan commander in pretended triumph reported a great victory. In each case, the commander who arranged this, and the energetic celebrations which accompanied it, was almost certainly deceiving his own, Spartan, soldiers, as well as his allies from other cities. He would be sure that his deception would be discovered before long. He evidently assumed that his morale-boosting lies would be accepted by his fellow citizens, with retrospect. Xenophon states that after one of these charades, the troops fought better and won a victory as a result of having been deceived. When eulogizing his patron and friend king Agesilaos of Sparta, Xenophon describes him as more honourable and straightforward than his Persian enemy, Tissaphernes. But, once war was formally declared, ‘deception as a result became religiously permissible and just, he completely outclassed Tissaphernes in deceit’. Xenophon meant this as a compliment: deceit, he says here, was *stratēgikon*, the quality of a good general (*Ages.* 1.10–13, 17). He approvingly records the trick enacted by another Spartan general, Pasimakhos. Enemies might be duly wary of Sparta’s hoplites, with the dreaded lambda (Λ, for ‘Lakedaimonioi’) painted on each shield. But Pasimakhos sought to lure the enemy into complacency, by disguising his men with the

shields of mediocre Sikyon bearing that city's initial, sigma (Σ). He reportedly said, 'these sigmas will deceive you, men of Argos, into coming to fight us' (*Hell.* 4.4.10; cf. Arist. *NE* 1117a). Here, for Xenophon, was good Spartan strategy.

Athens, Sparta's enduring rival and enemy, generated remarks about Spartan duplicity, such as the comic reference about Spartans being 'little foxes ...with treacherous souls, treacherous minds' (Aristophanes, *Peace* 1067–8). Of course an enemy will say such things, not least because an enemy is commonly a target for deceit, in diplomacy as in war. But Herodotos, a non-Athenian and not disrespectful of Sparta which he had personally visited (3.55), nevertheless writes that Athenians 'knew' that the Spartans tended 'to say one thing and think another' (9.54). Thucydides, in reporting the words of leading men in the Peloponnesian War, regularly depicts without comment their distortion of the truth, their spin. But only once does he say explicitly that someone was 'speaking untruth' – and that was of the Spartan Brasidas (4.108.5 with 85.7). In later times, lying became a quality in the stereotypical idea of Sparta. When Spartan culture was criticized as mendacious, a Spartan supposedly replied: 'That's right. We are free men. But if anyone else does not tell the truth, he will live to regret it' (Plut. *Mor.* 234 f., cf. 229a).

Because lying is widespread in many cultures, and especially between rivals and enemies, we may hesitate to pay attention to the view of other Greeks that Spartans were especially given to uttering systematic untruth. In our own times, we have learned especially to beware of anything that looks like a negative ethnic stereotype. But our modern manners may disarm us in the face of Sparta. Efficient lying may not have been seen by Spartans as negative. It was apparently something that they prided themselves upon; witness Xenophon's approving remarks above. Thucydides' account of how the 2000 impressive helots were identified and massacred in secrecy may have reached him, highly sensitive information though it was, because some Spartans boasted of their efficient deception. As to ethnic stereotyping: Spartan society was structured to produce a stereotype – of themselves. Spartans were, they themselves insisted, the *homoioi*, the 'similars' (e.g. Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.5, *Lak. Pol.* 10.7; 13.1). The young were educated in a single compulsory system, adults were aggregated away from their families, so as to be 'typed', stamped and moulded in a common culture. We have no reason to suppose that cultures will not differ sometimes as regards truth-telling. (In nineteenth-century England, an important motive in the reform of the elite Public Schools was a desire to eradicate a culture of lying to authority: see this work, Chapter 29). Modern scholars have disagreed as to how militarized Spartan culture was (see Hodkinson (2009a) and this volume, Chapter 2). But Sparta's special efficiency in military matters is the one aspect of her history about which we can be most certain.

It should be recognized that there need be nothing ethnic, in the sense of inborn, about a tendency to lie; it may be something generated by a culture of war. In English-speaking countries there is a commonplace saying that when war breaks out, truth is always the first casualty. There circulated in Germany, around the time of the First World War, a rhyme which may be especially useful in our own analysis of Sparta:

Kommt der Krieg ins Land,
Gibt's Lügen wie Sand.

When war enters the land,
Then lies are like sand.

The image of sand was chosen to suggest that lies were innumerable, but also, perhaps, that – like grains of sand – they could be scattered pervasively and be hard to get rid of. Lying, we should recall, is born of the same motive as secrecy: to withhold truth.

When Perikles, in Thucydides, describes Spartan secrecy, the term ‘acts of deception’ (*apatai*) is used of Sparta in the same sentence (2.39.1). Imitating the imagery of an early Greek poet (Hesiod), we might describe Mendacity as Secrecy’s more enterprising sister. The English language also suggests that active deceit is allowable in a military context. In describing without disapproval a deliberately deceptive arrangement, as of furniture or shop goods, we say that things are ‘strategically placed’. English, that is, uses the same word, with the same range of meaning, as did Xenophon in praising the deceitfulness of a Spartan king.

In approaching Spartan history, we may need to show a more suspicious caution than scholars have traditionally done. But that caution may liberate the historian, and make possible a sweeping new creativity. Knowing that we are likely to be offered lies of Spartan origin is not merely a recipe for scepticism. It may, surprisingly, lead us into new fields of reconstruction – by revealing areas where Spartans feared that the truth would damage them. There are, in two of our most important ancient sources for Sparta, Xenophon and Thucydides, certain internal tensions concerning access to the truth. Xenophon, as ally and client of Spartan authorities, tells enthusiastically of much that was unusually efficient about Spartan society. But for him one aspect of such efficiency, as we have seen, is Spartan deceptiveness. Should we not suspect that his eulogy of Spartan efficiency was itself in some ways issued to deceive? In the work of Thucydides, where active partisanship of this kind is not easily imaginable, a more subtle paradox may be detected. Sparta, in his view, was secretive and hard to know. And yet several of his statements about Sparta amount, when carefully analysed, to a wide-ranging claim to knowledge – sometimes in intimate and sensitive matters.

Thucydides writes that Spartans had no experience in the matter of piracy and guerrilla warfare in their own territory (4.41.3). This amounts to a claim about many years of Spartan history, over many areas of the southern Peloponnese. He makes his claim at a point when such warfare did come to trouble the Spartans, and when Athens happened to know – because Athenian troops had landed in Spartan territory and were deliberately provoking such trouble. And at this point he also notes that two boats manned by Messenian pirates, runaway Spartan helots that is (or just possibly their exiled kin from Naupaktos in the Corinthian Gulf), ‘happened’ to be present to threaten Sparta’s territory (4.9.1, cf. 53.3). Of an earlier episode, the death of the Spartan regent Pausanias, Thucydides writes that the ‘established Spartan procedure [*tropos*, in Greek] was not to punish irreversibly [i.e., to put to death] one of their own citizens without absolute proof’ (1.132.5). How did he know about Spartan custom (that is, behaviour over a long period), in such an intimate and embarrassing matter? Similarly, Spartans later became infuriated (in 418) with their king Agis, threatening to punish him by demolishing his house and imposing a colossal fine. Thucydides states that this was ‘contrary to their normal way of proceeding [*tropos*, again]’ (5.63.2). Agis survived, but the Spartans imposed on him a council of ten ‘advisors’, ‘a practice they had never previously had’ (5.63.4). How did Thucydides think that the secretive nature, as he described it elsewhere, of Sparta’s political system, allowed him to know how Spartans normally – that

is, over a long period – reacted to a supposedly deviant king, and that ‘advisors’ to a king had during *all* previous periods been unknown? Where did he think he was getting his information, if not from Spartans? In the same year, Spartan troops became disorientated and scared on a battlefield. Thucydides’ account of this is especially revealing. He writes, ‘At this moment, the Spartans experienced a panic worse than any that they themselves could remember’ (5.66.1–2). Again, something lamentable for Spartans is described, and alongside the description of the particular case is given a general denial that such had ever happened before, over a long period. But this time, most helpfully, Thucydides reveals that his source for this grand denial was the Spartans.

These cases of allegedly exceptional Spartan behaviour have interesting things in common. They all concern areas of Spartan vulnerability, which an enemy such as Athens might find it helpful to know. Sparta had an intense awareness of the principle that one state’s weakness was an opponent’s opportunity. The timing of her military expeditions abroad reveals this; see Chapter 11 in this volume. (And Thucydides, even when in exile, would be known to the Spartans as a former Athenian general who had campaigned against them, might do so again, and certainly might talk to others who would.) Again, all of these cases of Spartan weakness were indeed unusual – but not, perhaps, in the way that the Spartans might claim. They were unusual because the Athenians obviously knew about them. Athenians witnessed guerrilla warfare within Spartan territory, as we have seen. Athenians would know about the sudden and permanent disappearance of regent Pausanias, earlier the victorious commander against the Persians at Plataia, and a familiar if disliked figure on Greek territory outside Sparta. Scandal about his death would predictably arise abroad. Similarly with the general Spartan outrage against king Agis (soon afterwards to be the personal enemy of the Athenian politician and general Alkibiades, who spent time in exile at Sparta). And Sparta’s disorientation on the battlefield in 418 would be witnessed by its opponents there, including Athenians (5.67.2). In such cases Spartans would know that mere secrecy, simply to say nothing, would not do. Nor would denial of the particular case. Rather, it may seem that Spartans reacted in a way familiar today when an individual is caught in an embarrassing situation: by claiming in effect, ‘We don’t *normally* do this kind of thing.’

Statements from Thucydides and others about Sparta’s norms may therefore help us to identify Sparta’s real sensitivities. Was helot insurrection a lot more common, and therefore exploitable by an outside enemy, than Spartans liked to admit? Was that why young Spartan males were themselves taught guerrilla tactics, to live hidden in a landscape in a way which has nothing obvious to do with the requirements of classic hoplite warfare? Were Spartan citizens put to death more readily and often than the Spartan authorities liked to admit? We hear – but not from the contemporary Xenophon – that even citizen women of Sparta were put to death for political reasons in the early fourth century (Athenaeus 609b). It might help an enemy to know that Spartan society was far from an unshakeably solid team of ‘similars’. Were kings, in particular, the source of deep political division? We shall see, in Chapter 11, that well over half of Sparta’s royal rulers in the period 500–371 were either put to death or exiled or threatened with such punishment. As for disorientation on the battlefield in 418, unique so far as Spartans ‘remembered’, we think of the despair and surrender of the entire Spartan force on the isle of Sphakteria

just seven years earlier, in 425. At that point, Sparta's soldiers surrendered, attacked by missiles arriving through smoke. Sparta's reputation for correct orientation and manoeuvring on the battlefield was a precious military and political asset, useful for demoralizing the opponent. Xenophon, in his way, would try to protect it when writing his *Constitution of the Spartans*. He there wrote that for hoplites, amid confusion on the battlefield, to create a successful formation with whichever comrades they found next to them was not easy 'except for those educated under the laws of Lykourgos' (*Lak. Pol.* 11.7). Sparta's opponents, perhaps, should not even try. We see why the Spartans themselves might wish to propagate a view of history in which Spartan troops (unlike others) almost never lost their formation or their morale.

Once we are sensitized to Spartan claims of the form 'We don't have a general problem in such-and-such area. What happened was ... quite untypical of us', we may set off to explore Spartan history in a new way. When, for example, Herodotos writes that Sparta prospered militarily during the reign of kings Leon and Agasikles except for a *single* defeat, against the Arkadian state of Tegea (1.65.1), we should be sceptical. What happened to Sparta and its political system in the archaic period is an important mystery. We should like to know much more of how Sparta had come to earn its position as the chosen military leader of the coalition against Persia in 480. Thucydides was to state, as we have seen, that Sparta owed its effectiveness in foreign affairs to its internal peace, its avoidance of faction and revolutionary pressure. His claim that this happy state of affairs had lasted 'slightly more than 400 years, approximately' has guided modern scholars. It has been common to assign the beginning of Sparta's famous 'austere' constitution to the seventh century BC (as did de Ste. Croix (1972) 89–91) or even earlier. If this is correct, Sparta's male citizens may have consisted for three or more centuries, from the early archaic period down to the late fourth century, of the 'similars': males inspired by laws ascribed to Lykourgos, educated in childhood under a severe and levelling discipline, feeding together as adults on unappetizing food and little wine, forbidden to make flashy displays of private wealth but instead 'wearing clothes that even a poor man could afford' (*Arist. Pol.* 1294b), and trained above all to offer their lives for Sparta in battle. This is a tempting picture. It may possibly be right: its credibility is examined below by Van Wees (Chapter 8). Certainly this picture would explain how Sparta by the end of the sixth century might be superior militarily to other, more physically relaxed, Greek states.

However, Thucydides' grand claim about Sparta's ancient, undisturbed internal polity is at odds with his own normal method. The discrepancy is even more marked than in the case of the other broad statements which he made about the Spartan past, statements themselves in tension with his own view that Sparta's internal arrangements were traditionally obscured by secrecy. For Thucydides, when explaining his choice of the Peloponnesian War as subject matter for his history, stated that Greek history generally of more than a few years earlier than 431 was 'impossible to discover with certainty because of the passage of so much time' (1.1.3). As one of the best modern commentators on Thucydides observed, reluctantly, this 'must mean, both in language and logic, "Greek history before the Peloponnesian War", the whole of it' (Gomme (1945) 91). How did Thucydides come to believe that, in the case of Sparta, whose internal history he thought to be *more* obscure than that of other states, he could go back 'slightly more than 400 years, approximately'? It seems that he was willing to trust what he respectfully

referred to elsewhere as ‘the memory of the Spartans’. For information about other states, Thucydides noted that his sources often contradicted each other (1.22.3); this evidently and rightly put him on his guard. We should speculate as to whether the Spartan ‘similars’, in contrast, had learned a ‘party line’ about the vast antiquity of their own political system, so that when faced with Spartan informants the historian was disarmed by their unanimity.

1.3 Spartan Storytelling

In the dark history of secretive Sparta, there are some isolated and surprising pools of intense light and detail. Herodotos, Thucydides, Xenophon and other writers tell circumstantial stories of certain events in Spartan history. These stories tend to be moralizing, with clearly defined heroes and villains. They also tend to focus on the manner of death. And they are extraordinarily memorable, with much use of visual detail. Herodotos, for example, describes the bad death of the disgraced king Kleomenes (c.490). After being exiled, and reportedly organizing anti-Spartan activity among Sparta’s neighbours, this king was recalled to Sparta. There – with suspicious promptness – he went mad, assaulted the faces of fellow Spartans with a rod, was confined, but managed to kill himself by long incisions into his own flesh (Hdt.6.74–5). Kleomenes’ successor, Leonidas, was deemed to have had a good death. We hear enough from Herodotos about the courageous deeds of him and his 300 Spartans, against the Persians at Thermopylai (480), to form the basis of modern films. Leonidas’ co-king, from the other – parallel – royal house, was Leotychidas. His bad end (though not his death, in exile) is similarly graphic. He was, according to Herodotos, bribed by Thessalians not to press home his campaign against their pro-Persian regime. He was caught red-handed in corruption, attempting to hide – by sitting on it – a sleeve of Persian style stuffed with silver (Hdt.6.72). At the same period, the regent Pausanias who represented the Agiad royal house after Leonidas, and who – like Leotychidas – commanded in a victorious battle against the Persians (Pausanias at Plataia in central Greece, Leotychidas at Mykale in the eastern Aegean) himself came to a picturesque bad end. Pausanias was convicted of the worst offences imaginable against his own city and against Greece generally: conspiring with his former opponent, Persia, to impose Persian rule on Greece, and plotting with the helots to overthrow the rule of the ‘similars’ at Sparta. We read of him convicting himself in a conversation he thought secret, but which was being overheard by other Spartan authorities, ephors, hidden behind a screen. When, a little later, the ephors duly came to arrest him, one of them through favour gave a barely visible nod of the head to Pausanias to warn him of what was about to happen. He escaped to sanctuary on holy ground, and was starved almost to death. But, when he was about to die, the authorities carried him out, still breathing (*emphous*, in Greek). Thus he died, in a way (we are to infer) that avoided causing religious pollution to a shrine which might enduringly affect the whole community.

This tale about the end of Pausanias is told at remarkable length in the Greek. And it is told not by Herodotos, the ‘Father of History’ and a prince of storytelling. Pausanias’ end is narrated by the austere Thucydides (1.128–34). Again, this information about Sparta seems contrary to Thucydides’ normal method. Storytelling elements

(*to mythōdes*) would scarcely be found in his history, Thucydides had announced (1.22.4). But the picturesque is well represented in this story, with such details as the lurking ephors and the ‘barely visible’ nod; the text of a treasonable letter from Pausanias proposing to marry the king of Persia’s daughter; and Pausanias confronted by an outraged former boyfriend. For Thucydides to have trusted such a lively tale, concerning a period (*c.*470) eminently affected by ‘the passage of time’, he is likely to have been sure that its (ultimate) source was Spartan. In moralizing, visually, about the end of a royal ruler the story is part of a set. And there is one detail above all which suggests Spartan handiwork. The Spartan commander who fought with the most distinguished bravery in Thucydides’ own time was Brasidas, who was killed in battle in 422. Thucydides, as Athenian general, had earlier campaigned against Brasidas, and his respect for this Spartan opponent is obvious. Now, Brasidas died after planning a highly successful military engagement in northern Greece, one in which some 600 were killed on the Athenian side and only seven on the Spartan. That Brasidas himself was one of those few Spartan casualties told its own story; he had led bravely from the front. But Thucydides emphasizes the exact timing of his death. He died shortly after hearing that his men were victorious (5.10.11). The possible moralizing element is clear. Virtue had some reward; the story avoids the frustrating possibility that Brasidas died without realizing how gloriously he had succeeded. Spartans would be the ones to know exactly when the wounded Brasidas died, and what he knew before that point. And the word Thucydides uses to describe Brasidas when news of the victory was known is *empnous*, the same word which had been used of regent Pausanias, in that case too to make the moral point that, through the timing of the death, the worst had been avoided.

Our other contemporary source for extensive detail about classical Sparta is Xenophon. He too has moralizing tales of soldierly deaths, at times with a certain – morally positive – reference to relations between Spartan soldiers and their boyfriends. Pasimakhos and his men took up their famous and deceptive Sikyonian shields to fight, heavily outnumbered, as hoplites; and in the process Pasimakhos died. Although cavalrymen up to that point, they deliberately left behind the horses which could have saved them (*Hell.* 4.4.10). A group of Spartan imperial officials, commanded by one Anaxibios, finding themselves in a fatal position on the battlefield, sent away their (non-Spartan) allies but preferred to stand their own ground and die – accompanied by Anaxibios’ boyfriend, himself faithful to the end (*Hell.* 4.8.38–9). Xenophon claims to report the noble words of Anaxibios, as he foresees his own death. Since Xenophon also strongly suggests that all present, both steadfast Spartans and the allies who were permitted to flee, were promptly killed, we wonder how Xenophon thought he knew Anaxibios’ words. The question recalls the Thermopylai narrative. Of Thermopylai, too, we are told that Leonidas sent away Greek allies as defeat became highly probable (*Hdt.* 7.220–2). It may even be that an idealizing, false tale about Leonidas was now, almost a century later, generating real suicidal bravery through imitation. If so, that may be exactly what the Spartans intended by their myth-making. The son of Xenophon’s revered patron, king Agesilaos, had a boyfriend of his own, who later died in battle in good Spartan fashion. That death, Xenophon notes approvingly, while paining Agesilaos’ son to the limit, brought on him an important reflected glory (*Hell.* 5.4.33): he had chosen – or formed – the boyfriend as a soldier of good character.

1.4 Constructing History from Spartan Propaganda

Patterns, even genres, of Spartan manipulative communication are becoming clear. We find moralizing anecdotes especially about death; staged visual events (such as the celebrations after falsified news of victories, and of helot liberation; the dressing to suggest poverty); sweeping claims of undisturbed political and military excellence over long periods. Propaganda such as this may, however, prove more revealing than its authors realize. It tends to make clear which *values* are most important to those issuing the propaganda. And the origin of values is – history. It is worth first summarizing Spartan values as revealed in the examples of propaganda mentioned above. Most obviously, in calling themselves the ‘similars’, Spartans displayed their preference for the conformist over the impressive eccentric. Private wealth was not to be advertised. The individual ‘similar’ had to be ready to die for the community, but only as carrying out collective activity as ordered. Warfare was best carried out calmly: combing hair was at the virtuous extreme, panic at the other. Disloyalty in leaders was to be punished with exceptional severity in life, and by enduringly ignominious anecdotes after it. Among the homosocial similars, homosexual liaisons had positive value.

Ideals, as often, are a key to history. In our personal lives, we understand reflexively what is likely to have happened when an ideal is expressed. If we hear ‘Big boys don’t cry!’, we commonly and rightly suppose that a boy has been crying, or threatening to do so. The American electoral slogan ‘Yes we can!’ reveals a widespread pre-existent fear that, in fact, No, we can’t. This cognitive habit should be applied more widely – in writing history. Modern Europe shows the principle clearly. In Britain, what may seem to be mindless gloating in patriotic song, ‘Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves’, is revealed as originally something very different in the song’s next line: ‘Britons never, never, never, shall be slaves’. There, plainly, is the fear of foreign invasion. The names of prominent concourses in capital cities are especially revealing. ‘Trafalgar Square’ in London refers again to the fear of foreign invasion. On the other hand, in modern Greece, where revolutions and civil war have made internal stability a lively aspiration, ‘The Constitution’ is an emotive ideal: whence the names of ‘Syntagma’ (‘Constitution Square’) at the heart of Athens, in front of the Parliament building (formerly the royal palace), and of ‘Omonoia’, ‘Harmony Square’, close by. Modern France likewise has its ‘Harmony Square’, La Place de la Concorde, similarly reflecting a terror of internal disharmony. Here had occurred the extreme of discord: the square was the site of the main guillotine, where Louis XVI and his court were decapitated amid public celebration. A citizen who prominently advertised the ideals of the French Revolution, by naming himself ‘Philippe Egalité’, ‘Equality Philip’, was in fact senior royalty, and one of the richest men in France: the Duke of Orleans. The Duke’s Equality may be logically quite close to Spartan Similarity. Sparta’s fears, too, and thus Sparta’s history, are there to be discovered in her own propaganda.

Sparta’s ideals of military courage and discipline: what may they reveal? Perhaps the likeliest time for the beginning of Sparta’s famous, austere regime and way of life was the second half of the sixth century; see especially Van Wees (in the present work, Chapters 8 and 9). And that period followed a Spartan defeat (by neighbouring Tegea), and a surrender so resounding that Spartan secrecy could not efface it (Hdt.1.66). In the fifth century, as we have seen, Spartan troops surrendered to the Athenians in 425, on the

island of Sphakteria. Shortly afterwards, the Spartan authorities are described by Thucydides as being in panic (4.55.3–4). They evidently had reason to fear that the highest military standards would *not* be maintained. And for Sparta the need for military efficiency was even more obvious than for other major Greek states. The matter is put graphically by Xenophon, describing another panic in Spartan ruling circles (in 399 or thereabouts). An insecure new Spartan king, Agesilaos, claimed to have uncovered a plot in which Sparta's domestic subjects and political inferiors – helots, free *perioikoi* ('Dwellers around', on whom see Ducat, this work, Chapter 23) and other out-groups – were reportedly conspiring, with their overwhelming numbers, to set upon the Spartan citizenry. Xenophon reports a Spartan soothsayer, working with Agesilaos, as saying that the omens 'suggest we are already surrounded by enemies', men who would be willing to 'eat the Spartans even raw' (*Hell.* 3.3.4, 6). Even in their homeland, Spartans could not take their military security for granted.

Sparta's claim to 'Similarity' is likewise rewarding to explore against the grain. If similarity is a prominent ideal, a major problem, as perceived, must be – variety. We can detect several forms of variety which particularly troubled the Spartans. The two royal houses apparently survived from a time before austere official levelling was imposed. Their privileges provoked discomfort amid a culture of similarity. Kings acted, unless too young (or in exile), as 'hereditary generals for life', in Aristotle's phrase (*Pol.* 1285b). Their domestic influence, like their wealth, could also be very large. Paul Cartledge's work *Agesilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (1987), now the great handbook of intimate detail about Spartan politics and society, analyses the leadership, military and political, of the king who dominated Spartan policy for some forty years (c.400–359). At the death of a king, all classes of the population of Spartan territory were represented at a clamorous funeral (*Hdt.* 6.58–60), which celebrated the dead man so effusively that even the usually loyal Xenophon seems to complain. He states that such reverence appears to be greater than any mortal deserved (*Hell.* 3.3.1). Mourners cried out that the dead king was the best king yet. But funerals are in many cultures a time of extreme idealization. The classic expression of this is in Latin: *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* ('[Say] only good things about the [recent] dead'), though the original idea was attributed in Antiquity to a Spartan reformer of the sixth century BC, Chilon (Diog. Laert. 1.3.70). If excessive claims about a dead king were necessary, it was in part because so many royal rulers were, in their lifetimes, passionately contested at Sparta. Some were exiled under threat of a worse fate: Damaratos, Leotychidas and Pleistoanax in the fifth century, and Pausanias in the fourth. Others were killed at Sparta: regent Pausanias, and probably Kleomenes I before him. Classical Sparta was, in this limited respect, one of the most unstable Greek states of the classical period. (In Hellenistic Sparta, when the austere constitution survived mainly as an aspiration or a set of outward forms, not only was a king put to death – Agis IV in 241 – but his mother and grandmother were executed at the same time.)

'Similarity' was also a problematic ideal in respect of citizens' private wealth. Alone of Greek states, perhaps, Sparta abolished not only public drunkenness, as at festivals, but also the *symposion* ('drinking together'), the private – frequently aristocratic, exclusive and luxurious – drinking party around which so much of surviving Greek literary culture is constructed. To replace it, Sparta invented the *syssition* ('eating together'), where all male citizens were included, to eat and drink in moderation. The distinctive term 'syssition' signalled to Spartans an ideal of commonality. To us it signals also a problem

(of provocative inequality) which Sparta had to exert herself to avoid. The wearing of uniformly modest clothes was similarly a way of palliating an awkward fact: some were far wealthier than others. Indeed, while some Spartans were rich by any Greek standards, many other citizens of Sparta were threatened with demotion from citizen status, simply on grounds of insufficient wealth. If a man was unable to make the standard contribution towards the dining groups, the *syssitia*, he ceased to be a Spartiate and became an Inferior. Aristotle made an intense criticism of Sparta for allowing wealth to concentrate in a few families, and the citizen body to become so small. In his view, Sparta perished as a great power through shortage of (citizen) population, *oliganthrōpia* (*Pol.* 1270a). In addition to levelling dress, Spartans devised other ways of avoiding friction between rich and poor, such as the provision of extra food by the wealthy for sharing at their *syssitia*. Stephen Hodkinson's book *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta* (2000) illuminates the many ways in which inequalities of wealth were addressed by – or defeated – the Spartan system. The name 'Similar' not only reflected a grave problem of dissimilarity; it was also, like levelling *syssitia* and dress, a device to address the problem, to calm resentments by assuring less wealthy citizens that their status was comparable with that of the grandest.

The ideal of Similarity responded to other fears. In most Greek states, Xenophon makes clear, *symposia* reflected and promoted social division by age. The young had parties with the young, the old with the old (*Lak. Pol.* 5.5). Generation gaps tended to lead to political tensions and even revolution. The point was perhaps even clearer in ancient Greece than in the modern world: a standard Greek word for 'revolution', *neōterismos*, recalled, if indeed it did not reflect, the standard word for the young, *neoi*: revolution might be seen as a young man's affair. Sparta's *syssitia*, Xenophon suggests, involved men of all ages dining together. Families (as Plato complained, *Laws* 788a–b) were a particularly fertile source of variety in citizens. We find, in keeping with the ideal of similarity, that measures were taken at Sparta to restrict the time husbands and wives spent together; couples were not to develop their own cultures. Parental culture, in its diversity, was one reason why Sparta made schooling together compulsory for the children of citizens. Another source of diversity was even more to be feared. Spartan estates, in Laconia and Messenia, were scattered over huge distances. And in those territories Spartan citizens were outnumbered many times over by *perioikoi*, various Inferiors, and above all by helots. Unless compelled to come together to school, many Spartiate children would have tended to find playmates of inferior status and thereby to assimilate with them. That was decidedly not the kind of Similarity which Spartiate parents wished for (see this work, Chapter 29). The word 'Similar' hid a presupposition ('Similar to whom?'), rather like the British term for elite speech, 'Received Pronunciation' (Received by whom?). At Sparta, as elsewhere, the important thing was to be similar to the right people.

We have already noted several ancient references – chiefly from Xenophon – to homosexual couples among Spartan men. Xenophon suggests approval in particular cases, but also is explicit in commending the social value for Spartans of youthful couples, in which a young man might effectively educate a youth for whom he had strong feelings. Sparta's lawgiver Lykourgos, we are told, approved – provided there was no copulation or obvious lust (*Lak. Pol.* 2.13). This form of Spartan sociability has been well explored by modern scholars, and especially by Paul Cartledge ((1981) and (1987)). Modern values

may, however, tend to obscure the full significance of same-sex relationships in Sparta. In western liberal discourse of recent times, the tendency has been to *defend* (against conservative pressures within our own societies) the rights of adult homosexual couples, but not usually to advocate homosexuality as an ideal for all or most. In Sparta, things may have been different, with a certain form of male homosexuality positively promoted as of general utility. Now, if we miss this difference, we may miss also the need to ask: if more homosexuality was seen as an ideal at Sparta, what was felt to be the problem to which the ideal responded?

If we do ask the above question, we can at last give proper value to a striking but undervalued passage of Aristotle on the sexuality of Spartans (*Pol.* 1269b). He wrote, in the second half of the fourth century, that Spartan male citizens were excessively influenced by females. Using a term of which the power can be sensed even by those who do not read Greek, Aristotle described the men of Sparta as *gynaikokratoumenoi*: ‘under the rule of women’. And the reason, Aristotle suggests, is lust in men, of the heterosexual kind. As he graphically puts it: Homer was right to portray Ares, the god of war, as passionately and adulterously attached to Aphrodite, goddess of sex. Soldierly Spartans were correspondingly, excessively, drawn to their own women, for sexual reasons. Aristotle makes a wide-ranging and seemingly passionate argument for the idea that women had a destructive effect on imperial Sparta. We should be a little cautious of possible over-enthusiasm on his part, as he (in his own phrase, used elsewhere) *defends a thesis*. But as a profoundly intelligent – and near-contemporary – commentator on the last decades of Spartan hegemony, his evidence cannot be dismissed. If we see male homosexual passion at Sparta as *normative* (that is, the ideal, commonly practised) rather than as the *normal* (that is, the numerically predominant) form of sexuality, we may again identify an influential form of Spartan fear: fear of female influence over what was meant to be a soldierly, homosocial, society of men, in harmony with each other rather more than with their women.

By understanding Sparta’s ideals as the reaction to her fears, the grandest ideal of all may be illuminated. This is the claim that the Spartan political system had been stable for ‘slightly more than 400 years, approximately’. We have already seen reason to think it probable that Thucydides accepted this claim from the Spartans themselves. There is a further, more direct, indication that the Spartans thought in this way. Early in the Peloponnesian War (c.427), Pleistoanax, a Spartan king long exiled in disgrace, was allowed to return. His return was marked by ceremonies, employing ‘the same choruses and sacrifices as when they first established the kings at the foundation of Lakedaimon’ (5.16.3). Now, Spartans and Greeks generally would have understood by this a period far more remote even than the start of the ‘slightly more than 400 years, approximately’, which Thucydides wrote of in describing Sparta’s enduring constitution. A period, that of the foundation of Sparta, which for us is the darkest of dark ages, was one which Sparta told a detailed story about. What was to be gained by exaggerating continuity? Plato in the *Laws* (798a–c), almost certainly with Sparta in mind, is clear and convincing. This, he says, is a matter of such political importance that the citizens of his ideal state must be firmly guided away from the truth: they must have no idea that, in their city, any political system other than the present, correct one has ever existed. Faced with a system of vast longevity, they will assume all revolution to be impractical. Conversely, knowledge of an *ancien régime* successfully overthrown encourages (as in modern France) thoughts

of new constitutions for the future. We have already seen signs that the Spartans were, in reality, nervous about the stability of their regime. Regent Pausanias was accused of plotting subversion with the helots. King Agesilaos played on fears of insurrection concerning an alleged plot among out-groups willing to 'eat' the Spartans. But the most telling single act, in this respect, is the decision of the Spartan authorities to exclude from all official posts those citizens who had surrendered to Athens on Sphakteria and who, in 421, had been allowed to return to Sparta (Thuc. 5.34.2). The authorities, Thucydides states, acted from fear that this group, some 120 men, would become revolutionaries.

Of what revolutionary tendency, more precisely, were the Spartan authorities afraid? The returned prisoners-of-war from Sphakteria included a notable proportion of 'the first' Spartans, by which Thucydides (5.15.1) probably meant those with most prestige, wealth – and influential relatives. Here is evidence of significant *dissimilarity* among the citizen body. Sparta's ruling royalty, of whom in the period 500–395 a majority (seven out of eleven) were either killed, exiled or threatened with exile, were, of course, from the first of the first families. The fear most likely to have activated defenders of the regime was of a move towards restored aristocracy on familiar Greek lines, of a return to an easier and more privileged life for the very few, and of an end to the rigorous Similarity which aided the majority of citizens. The role of helots or *perioikoi* in such a move to aristocracy might be this: they would be offered liberation in return for acting as allies of the revolutionaries, against the conservative authorities of Sparta. In the fourth century, as Aristotle insisted, and no doubt earlier, the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer Spartan hands was already tending in that direction. Hellenistic Sparta would take the process further, in spite of occasional attempts to restore the 'laws of Lykourgos'. The killing, in the third century, of king Agis IV and his female relatives was carried out at the instigation of the wealthy, successfully resisting a royal attempt to bring back the austere constitution and the culture of Similarity. When, only a few years after Agis' death, another revolutionary king, Kleomenes III, himself tried to recreate a 'Lykourgan' regime, he made enormous grants of Spartan citizenship to *perioikoi* (Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 11.3), thus supplying himself with thousands of partisans to help overcome conservative resistance from powerful citizen opponents. By that period, the later part of the third century, conservatism at Sparta meant resistance to – rather than defence of – a 'Lykourgan' system: that much was the reverse of the pattern known in the classical period. But what may have remained constant was the principle whereby revolutionary citizens appealed to the helots or *perioikoi* for help against their own conservative fellow-citizens. The presence, in Sparta's home territories of Laconia and Messenia, of a vast reservoir of disaffected Greeks, the helots and some *perioikoi*, was surely a standing temptation to politically discontented Spartans looking for allies. All would know this. So long as these out-groups greatly outnumbered Spartan citizens, any Spartan regime had a great deal to be afraid of.

It is reasonable to suspect that the idea, in Thucydides' day, of a Spartan constitution more than 400 years old was a grand falsehood, propagated to foreign enemies, to helots, and quite likely to Spartans themselves to reduce the prospect of regime change engineered from without, or aristocratic revolution inspired from within. We have seen, in the case of military defeats, that Spartans were not averse to being lied to, in what they considered a good cause. Along with this ideal of a political system stable for centuries, the associated fear which we should infer, is in fact displayed with remarkable clarity.

Both Herodotos and Thucydides write of Sparta's long-lived stability. And each of them, in the very passage where he does so, makes a dramatic comment about how *bad* had been the political instability before the revolutionary change to stability occurred. Both write of extreme *stasis* in this early Sparta. Herodotos writes that the Spartans in their internal affairs had been 'almost the most unruly of all Greeks' (1.65.2). Thucydides says that Sparta's internal conflicts had been 'the most enduring of any state he knew' (1.18.1). Once more, how would Thucydides think he knew of these remote horrors, from *much* more than the 'four centuries' earlier, unless the Spartans had told him of how dreadful things were before the coming of their famous austere constitution?

Scepticism about the longevity of Sparta's system should, therefore, arise from analysis of literary texts. But there is other, picturesque, evidence of a Sparta in the sixth century living in a style very different from that associated with Lykourgos. For some fifty years in that century, vase painters in Laconia – Sparta's heartland – produced figurative scenes showing wealthy men indulging themselves in a traditional Greek style, albeit with some distinctive local features (Pipili (1987), Powell (1998)). This remarkable Laconian pottery is analysed in this volume (Chapter 5) by Maria Pipili and, it should be admitted, her expert interpretation of the vases is, in important respects, not supportive of the political interpretation suggested here. In the vase paintings, elegantly dressed men are depicted reclining, not at austere *syssitia* but at relaxed *symposia*. One vase shows a large mixing bowl of wine, promising intoxication to the symposiasts. On another vase, lavishly dressed female musicians accompany the drinkers (Chapter 5, Figure 5.3). No doubt it was understood that by the end of the drinking, these young women might be in a rather different state of dress. (Athenian vases showing scenes of consummated debauchery at symposia are collected in Kilmer (1993).) Elsewhere a privileged young man poses on a fine horse (Chapter 5, Figure 5.9). On a small Laconian cup, other, less composed, young people (probably men rather than women) are shown naked, pursued, whipped and penetrated by what seem to be older citizens stylishly dressed. (For sketches of this indelicate scene, Pipili (1987) 66, fig. 95; Powell (1998) 131.) These vases, even now, survive in considerable numbers. In the sixth century there was evidently a conspicuous industry in Laconia producing them, even though on a scale much smaller than for Attic vase painting. There is little doubt about the period to which these Laconian vases belong. One vase depicts – and names – a Greek king of Cyrene, Arkesilas, as he supervises the shipping of exports. Whether this is Arkesilas I or (as usually thought) Arkesilas II, the date of the vase is not far from the 570s. The culture implied by these vases is utterly unlike the iron puritanism attributed to Lykourgos. Here is extreme display of wealth and physical self-indulgence. These vases are still somewhat undervalued by historians – perhaps because they confuse the traditional narrative of a Lykourgan regime going back for centuries. How should we interpret them?

To protect traditional chronology, scholars have sometimes suggested that these vases had nothing, or nothing much, to do with the Spartiates. The strongest point in favour of this idea is that relatively few of these Laconian vases are found in Laconia; most of the finds are from abroad, notably from the territory of Samos, in the eastern Aegean. May they not have been produced in Laconia by non-Spartiate craftsmen, distributed by business people also of non-Spartiate status and, as Pipili argues in this volume, designed to appeal to the tastes and *mores* of Greeks far from Sparta? Attention has turned to the *perioikoi*, citizens of neighbouring communities, outside Sparta. Were they responsible

for this artistic portrayal of opulent living? The idea cannot be disproved. But much seems to tell against it. The *perioikoi*, when we have a little detailed information about them, in the fifth century and later, mostly behave as loyal allies of Sparta. Few of them revolted, even when given a good opportunity, as during the 460s when Sparta itself was laid low by a major earthquake and helots in large numbers defected. *Perioikoi*, indeed, would be integrated en masse into the ranks of the Spartan army in the fifth century; they were, at least from that period onwards, intimate if not trusted allies. Would the *perioikoi* have systematically propagated images celebrating precisely the aristocratic life-style that the Lykourgan culture was constructed to resist? We do not know that the *perioikoi* themselves had the wealth to sustain an elite with the sort of lavish tastes reflected on the vases. The Spartans, the ultimate masters of Laconia and Messenia, presumably had most of the best land. If Sparta in the mid-sixth century had been run on Lykourgan lines, with the *perioikoi* mostly loyal to Sparta, living on marginal land and far from wealthy, it is difficult – though not impossible – to think of *perioikoi* drawing their images of aristocratic fun-and-games from far away, and then selling a version of those images back to remote Greek communities which appreciated such things. A successful export trade commonly needs a local market to sustain it, and indeed initially to generate it. Also, how would the Spartans, if they were already under an austere regime, have felt about their *perioikoi* spreading images of extreme aristocratic indulgence around the Greek world? It was a characteristic of classical Sparta to project abroad an austere picture of itself: images of inflexible, indomitable Sparta were an important instrument of war.

The important fact that only a minority of the Laconian vases have so far been found in Laconia may have other explanations. The site of ancient Sparta now lies largely under the modern town of Sparti, and is not easy to excavate. In Antiquity, Spartans of the austere period, if that began (say) in the late sixth century, may have contributed to purging the politically incorrect images from earlier times. One particular detail may be telling. Some Laconian vases of non-Lykourgan inspiration *have* been found at Sparta. Among them is (for us, at least) the most provocative of all: the one showing whipping and penetration of young people by a relaxed elite. The vase (now displayed, with some reluctance, in the Museum of Sparti), was found at the shrine of (Artemis) Orthia, a principal site of Spartan cult. That same site would become the venue for public whipping of the young of a very different sort: the ordeals displaying persistence-amid-pain described by Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 2.9) in the classical period and by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 18) some five centuries later. Scholars agree that these whipping ordeals had changed in purpose between the times of Xenophon and Plutarch. What had been a militaristic lesson in physical courage was, in Plutarch's day, part of a touristic attraction, designed to impress visitors in an age when Sparta was part of the Roman Empire and had no wars of its own to fight. Should we posit a further change, at an earlier period? Had there perhaps been a previous way of whipping the young, for sexual pleasure, which had itself been associated with the shrine of Orthia in the Archaic Period (whence the vase deposited at the shrine)? This too could have changed its form as part of a changing political culture, rather as austere Sparta had converted indulgent *symposia* into disciplined *sysitia*. Public whipping of the young may have evolved as spectacular religious festivals often do, with changing times: converted, in this case, from a display of predatory aristocratic fun into a scene of rigorous, Lykourgan, morality.

These illustrated, and frequently elegant, vases with their scenes of aristocratic life may be of central importance for Spartan history. They strongly suggest, though do not quite prove, that Sparta, until about half a century before the Persian invasion and the defining moment of Thermopylai, was not ‘Spartan’ in the modern sense. It quite probably was a relaxed, possibly over-relaxed, aristocratic *polis* of a familiar Greek kind. But whereas other Greek *poleis* of the archaic period reacted against their aristocracy by installing a dictator, a *tyrannos* who repressed aristocracy in the name of the wider citizen population, Sparta instead empowered that population directly in a way designed to restrict aristocratic excess. The aristocratic Laconian vases may help us understand how the grand Spartan falsehood took hold, of an austere system stretching back undisturbed for hundreds of years. That story was told, insistently and consistently, because Spartans sensed and feared the opposite. In reality, the old regime with its exceptionally bad *stasis*, was alarmingly close. What had ceased only a few generations back, might well return.

Spartans have been repeatedly criticized for stupidity – in modern times. Even de Ste. Croix may have suggested irrationality in the Spartans when he (famously) compared them to a dragon of Germanic myth, living a ‘nasty’ life in a cave in order to protect its possessions ((1972) 91). An understanding of Spartan fears, and of how systematically Sparta reacted to them, may refute that idea. The Spartans from the late archaic period (or perhaps earlier) did indeed devise and adhere to a system which involved suffering, deprivation and effort for themselves, a combination which other Greeks called *ponos*. But that system was intelligently conceived to respond to their particular fears, the fear of things much worse than *ponos*, of humiliation by their own aristocracy, of being conquered and destroyed by their own helots. There remained, of course, much normal pleasure at Sparta, pleasures of company, sex, occasional good food and some wine, and especially of long and elaborate festivals, festivals so important that even soldiering had to take second place to them. But the distinctive pleasure which the Spartan system delivered to its members was less physical than moral. That itself may reflect intelligence, since much pleasure in other societies which is assumed to be sought for physical, ‘materialist’, reasons is in fact sought mainly for reasons of status.¹

The moral pleasure of Spartans involved being recognized, with some security, as people of important status. Intelligent Spartans may indeed have understood, as their critics have not, how fear – correctly and lucidly dealt with – had helped them to their revered standing. There was, we hear, in third-century Sparta, a temple dedicated to an unusual deity: Phobos, ‘Fear’. The reference, in Plutarch (*Kleomenes* 8), is incidental. There is no reason to suppose that the cult was first created at that period; it may well be older and from the classical period. Why worship Fear? How was Fear supposed to contribute to Sparta? There may be a clue in a speech attributed by Thucydides to Brasidas, the most respected embodiment of Spartan physical courage (and strategic intelligence) from the late fifth century. Brasidas writes that soldierly efficiency – to repeat, his own quality, on which he spoke with authority – derived in part from *aiskhynē*, meaning the fear of incurring others’ bad opinions (Thuc. 5.9.9). Fear of a kind, moral fear, may have been recognized by Spartans as a reason for their own success. The Sparta which created an austere life for itself, whether in the late sixth century or earlier, was not yet master even of the Peloponnese. Its members had no reason to suppose that their stressful arrangements, inspired by the fear of disaster, would one day lead to their supremacy in the Greek world. But Spartans would not be the last people in history to

realize slowly, perhaps too gradually to feel much surprise, that defensive measures contrived to avoid utter disaster could lead to extreme success. Aristotle says that it was a commonplace among writers in the classical period, that ‘the Spartans governed a large empire because they had been trained to face dangers’: *Pol.* 1333b.

1.5 Sparta Abroad – and Exposed

The mysteries of Sparta’s inner life can be *partly* penetrated by thinking hard about the propaganda she issued. But there are some things about Sparta which other Greeks could perceive for themselves, direct information for them – and good information for us. These were the things that Spartans did away from home, in the territory of other Greeks (or, sometimes, at sea), and thus were far harder to hide. How far does this relatively direct information confirm the picture we construct of Spartan culture and mentality?

Something which poses special problems for secretive and deceptive regimes is the death of their leaders. For such cannot be hidden for long. Because Sparta’s kings were hereditary generals, very much on view when the main Spartan army took the field, accompanied by a host of Greek allies from other states, their disappearance from campaigns was significant, and would be quickly noticed. This may be part of the reason why we are informed of the fact – subversive though it was – that so many of Sparta’s royal rulers came to a bad end, or came close to such. Sparta *had* to issue its own account of their disappearance from command, or of obvious limitations put on their command (like regent Pausanias, abruptly recalled to Sparta in the 470s, and king Agis II, hedged about with commissars in 418), or, of course, of their exile. On important subjects, human nature abhors a vacuum of information; rumour and propaganda occupy the void. A Spartan official version would be contrived, to restrict the field for enemies abroad to impose interesting explanations of their own.

The death rate of Spartan commanders on campaign was similarly impossible to hide, even if Sparta had wished to. That death rate is impressively higher than for commanders of Athens, the other state for which we have most information. Athenian commanders may be put to death *after* a campaign, by a victorious enemy (as Nikias and Demosthenes at Syracuse in 413), or even by their own city (after Arginousai in 406). But they do not die fighting to the same extent as Spartans: Kleon, Brasidas’ last Athenian opponent, is a rarity. Both of Sparta’s most successful commanders of the late fifth century, Brasidas and Lysandros (Lysander), died fighting. So did the admirals Mindaros (in 410) and Kallikratidas at Arginousai. Likewise king Kleombrotos at the decisive battle of Leuktra (371). And we have already alluded to the occasion when a number of Spartan governors of the early fourth century reportedly chose to die fighting rather than to run away. Here, it seems, is confirmation that there was a special Spartan ethos, generated within Sparta, and imposing physical courage.

And Thermopylai? Is not that a textbook case of Spartan bravery unto death? Thermopylai, we should admit, is rather special. King Leonidas, there is no doubt, knowingly and thus bravely led his army into a situation of exceptional danger, and died there. But details of his last days are obscure. Thermopylai in modern times has indeed been used, and abused, in textbooks: see Stefan Rebenich’s Chapter 27 in this work, on the

reception of Sparta in Germany. And the best textbook information, as of Spartans combing their hair before battle, or talking manfully of appreciating the ‘shade’ from a dark cloud of Persian arrows, seems to come from Spartans, through Herodotos. But the Spartans of this period did not issue textbooks. Or indeed any books. They issued propaganda. And after Thermopylai, especially immediately afterwards when the Persians were through the pass and attacking Athens, the need for reassuring propaganda was acute. The main public fact, available to all and undeniable, was that a small but significant Spartan force, its royal commander, and other allies under Spartan command, had been annihilated, with little obvious gain. A victorious Persian army was at hand, and Sparta’s leadership of fractious Greek states was in need of argument in its support. The victories of Salamis, Plataia and Mykale were in the future, not yet predictable. Sparta had every reason to look for, and if necessary to create, a silver lining for the desperate information concerning Thermopylai. The most that could be extracted was, a claim that the resistance to Xerxes’ uncountable host was long (lasting for more than two days, we are told) and thus intensely competent; maintained until death and thus supremely brave; and as focused as possible on Spartans (Herodotos tells that Leonidas sent away many of his Greek allies before the end). We sadly ask: Did, for example, these brave Spartans really stay fighting for days? The question is not simply one of bravery. The reason why the most physical among the modern contact sports are programmed for minutes and not days – rugby for eighty minutes, Australian Rules for eighty and American football for sixty, and all with intervals for rest – is that after those minutes even the fittest of athletes tend to collapse.

It is of the essence of battles in which one side perishes to the last man that no one from that side lives to tell their side of the story. Two Spartans, however, did survive, sent away – it was said – by Leonidas near the end, one as a messenger the other because of an eye problem. Their subsequent treatment at Sparta was so harsh as to be suspicious. Both were abused and humiliated, publicly identified as cowards. We should suspect, given Sparta’s skill at deception and myth-making, that this treatment was not performed mainly to create a moral example. Neither man had run away; both had obeyed orders. Was Sparta’s reaction meant rather, by disgracing the two survivors, to destroy their *credit* as sources? Did they, in short, know too much, things reflecting normal humanity in Leonidas and his men which would have complicated and thus weakened the moral tale which Sparta needed? Herodotos says of one of them, Aristodamos, that no Spartan would *converse* (*dielegeto*) with him (7.231). We naturally understand that no one would *speak* to him; but was the main point rather that no Spartan should be *spoken to* by him? It may be that Sparta’s most unusual achievement involving Thermopylai was to create a myth which would propel her own men to generally successful, if often fatal, bravery in the future.²

Thucydides’ report that Sparta was secretive about its internal arrangements again seems to be confirmed by secrecy outside Spartan territory, detectable – in outline – by other Greeks. In enemy territory, Spartan commanders execute a striking number of their manoeuvres by night. This was Brasidas’ method of surprising Athenian possessions in the north, such as the town of Amphipolis (424). Gylippos, Spartan general in charge of Syracuse’s defence against Athens during 414–13, likewise carried out several attacks by night (most notably against Plemmyrion). In 390, after a Spartan force had suffered heavy losses near Corinth, its commander led it back to Sparta in such a way as to pass the towns which lay en route during, or close to, the times of darkness (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.18), almost certainly so that other Greeks of the Peloponnese should not see, and draw

lessons from, Sparta's new weakness. Herodotos reports that Sparta's army, when it left home in exceptional numbers to fight the Persians (479), passed through *its own* territory by night (9.10). Was this inconvenient practice chosen solely as training for night manoeuvres later, in enemy territory? Or was it in part to prevent the helots from understanding how large a proportion of Sparta's defenders was being withdrawn? Aristotle would later write of the helots, again in general, that 'they continually lie in wait, as it were, to exploit Sparta's misfortunes' (*Pol.* 1269a).

Sparta's secretive ways were revealed unforgettably by another device: the use of a simple code to encrypt military messages. No other Greek state of the period is recorded as routinely using written code. The wording of a Spartan message was written across successive loops of a long band of material wrapped round a stick of a certain width (perhaps even irregular?), a *skytalē* of which only the Spartans authorities had a duplicate. If enemies intercepted the material, once detached from its original stick, it would – even if they recognized it for what it was – take a little while using trial and error before the cloth could be aligned correctly and the message read. Naive though the procedure sounds, Sparta would at least gain some time thereby – and timing in the field was something of which Sparta had an advanced appreciation. The *skytalē* system also made it less easy for a message to be falsified, as for example by the messenger or by someone with access to him. After a Spartan fleet, under admiral Mindaros, had suffered a defeat by Athens in 410, a despairing *skytalē* message home was intercepted and read gleefully at Athens. According to Xenophon (*Hell.* 1.1.23), it ran as follows: 'The ships are lost. Mindaros is dead. The men are starving. We don't know what to do.' The sensational impression which this revelation would have made, no doubt far beyond Athens, would have helped to spread a lively interest in Sparta's secretive methods.

Sparta's nocturnal manoeuvres were designed to deny the enemy *sight* of what Sparta was doing (exactly as Perikles reportedly said, about the Spartans denying sight, *theama*, of what was militarily sensitive: Thuc. 2.39.1). Manipulating what the enemy – and others – saw was something which could also be done positively, by the deliberate creation of suggestive spectacles. These might be meant to invert the truth, as with the Spartans who deceived their enemy by carrying shields with the sign of Sikyon, or to accentuate the truth. Sparta's troops, marching with their long hair and in scarlet cloaks, were surely meant to draw the enemy's gaze and to let Sparta's intimidating military reputation do its work. A Spartan force, at its best, 'gave the impression of consisting entirely of bronze and scarlet' (Xen. *Ages.* 2.7). Xenophon, who campaigned alongside Spartan officers, insists on the emphasis they put on what others, and they themselves, could *see*. The Spartan Cheirisophos, Xenophon's fellow commander on an expedition in unfamiliar Persian territory (401–00), is quoted as arguing repeatedly from what 'you can see'. The Spartan king Agesilaos is described, again by Xenophon, as contriving an impressive military spectacle before his own planned assault on the Persian empire:

you could see the gymnasias full of men exercising, the hippodrome full of horsemen riding, the javelin throwers and the archers at target practice. He made the whole city something worth *seeing*. The market-place was full of armaments and horses for sale, while the bronze-smiths and [list of other craftsmen] were all preparing military equipment. As a result, you would truly have thought the city a workshop of war. *One would also have been fortified to see ...* (*Ages.* 1.26f.; *Hell.* 3.4.16–18).

The city where this display was mounted was Ephesos, in Asia Minor. But it was at Sparta that Agesilaos had learned to use the visual to work on men's minds.

Xenophon, for so long Sparta's partisan, insists often on Sparta's difference in military matters. Here it is a Spartan spectacle of a 'workshop of war'. Elsewhere, as we have seen, he talks of battlefield manoeuvres which were not easy to learn 'unless one had been brought up under the laws of Lykourgos'. In another context he describes the military use of divination by Sparta: Spartans in this respect could be 'seen as the only true craftsmen of war'. Compared with them, all other armies would seem to be mere 'improvisers', making things up as they went along (*Lak. Pol.* 13.5). Xenophon insists so much – too much? This theme of Sparta's military superiority was perhaps itself part of Sparta's military superiority: effective propaganda as an instrument of war. We ourselves should insist on remembering that there was a lot more to Spartan life than preparation for war (Hodkinson, this volume, Chapter 2). But it is not only the pro-Spartan Xenophon who insists on Sparta's difference. Aristotle, who vigorously insisted that Sparta was not an ideal to be imitated, points out that after 370, after the loss of its hegemony and even of Messenia, Sparta was not a happy community (*Pol.* 1333b). Now, he writes, the Spartans no longer rule over others, and they lose battles (*Pol.* 1338b) because now they have rivals in the matter of (militaristic) training. For long the Spartans had no such rivals in education, and it was this singularity which gave them their rule over others.

The military (and political) principle of waiting for special opportunity was widely familiar in Greek culture. The Greek word for opportunity, *kairos*, occurs often in military narrative. There was also a term meaning 'to be on the look-out for an opportunity': *kairophylakein*. Helots employed such a mentality against the Spartans, as Aristotle shows. And the Spartans themselves were alert to it. In arranging with their enemy Argos (in 420) to settle a dispute by a battle at some future date, by appointment, Sparta agreed explicitly with Argos not to have that battle at a time when either side was distracted by war elsewhere, or by epidemic disease (Thuc. 5.41.2). Each thus predicted and guarded against the other's enduring sense of *kairos*. We shall see later (Chapter 11) that Sparta observed the need for strategic timing to a most remarkable extent. Over most of the fifth century she usually opened a war, or a campaign in a new area, against Athens when the Athenians were distracted by some special weakness. And, which is not the same thing, Sparta never began such a war or campaigned in a new area unless there was such a *kairos*. These correlations between Spartan initiatives and her opponent's times of weakness, are extensive and go far beyond coincidence. They emerge from Thucydides' narrative. But they do not emerge from any explicit generalization of his. Aristotle's generalization, about the helots' use of opportunity *against* Sparta, is a rarity. That Thucydides does not generalize here may be in part because his Spartan sources refused to talk in such general terms. As well they might. For an awareness of how Sparta's actions were systematically governed by *kairos* would present enemies with opportunities of their own: opportunities to predict Spartan strategy, the timing and direction of campaigns, the periods and regions in which Sparta would *not* campaign. A strict policy of observing *kairos* logically imposed a desire to obscure the existence of that policy.

This enduring pattern of Spartan strategy suggests virtually a formula. And that the formula was employed for so long suggests a consistency of Spartan mentality over a long period. There was a lasting economy to Sparta's movement, a collective self-control

which prevented Sparta's giving way to annoyance and to wishful thinking. There was, for example, no Spartan attack on Athens when Athens herself had cheated and defied Sparta by rebuilding her city wall in the 470s; that was not a time of *kairos*. Spartans knew how to wait. Sparta's consistent respect for opportunity is a case of her external acts, her foreign campaigns visible to Greeks generally, allowing us to reconstruct collective mentality within Sparta. Here was indeed a society of much (though far from total) similarity, over time as well as between individuals at each moment. Other cases of Sparta reacting somewhat formulaically will be seen elsewhere in this volume. The tendency already noticed, for Spartans to turn on their own kings, may be an example.

Another pattern observable in Sparta's behaviour away from home is the unwillingness to try to export the Spartan system. Athens, in contrast, in her empire vigorously exported copies of her own *dēmokratia*, with popular assemblies and democratically appointed officials encouraged to exist, or indeed imposed, in states under Athenian control. Sparta never acted correspondingly, but usually chose rather to impose oligarchies of traditional types, without promoting any general reform on 'Lykourgan' lines within subject states. Even when Sparta's hegemony was widest and most potent, in the years after the defeat of Athens in 404, there was no attempt to 'Lykourgize' Greece. Indeed, Sparta clearly had no settled policy in the matter of what regimes to impose – except in one respect: that other states were *not* to be reformed on Spartan lines. On defeated Athens, Sparta first imposed a government, 'The Thirty', which was inspired to a degree by Spartan models. But there is no evidence of Spartan pressure to reform Athens enduringly and structurally on 'Lykourgan' lines, and most significantly no trace of an attempt to introduce a rigorous Spartan style of education for the Athenian young. By 403 Sparta settled, remarkably, for an Athens ruled once again by insubordinate democrats, the very form of constitution which had generated so many decades of Athenian expansion, resistance and threat to Sparta. Clearly, almost any form of government at Athens was better, in Spartan eyes, than one which mimicked Sparta. This may well be another case of Spartan secrecy: Spartans, as Thucydides concluded, did not want others to *know* what the Spartan system amounted to. Other states, whose citizen populations far outnumbered Sparta's, were not to be given what Sparta considered the formulae behind her own success.

We began by noting that there was something very modern about the Spartans: their manipulation of news, secrecy – in short state propaganda. The modernity may now be seen to go much wider. What Sparta achieved was to be a forerunner of modern industrial society, which since the eighteenth century has consciously and increasingly depended on *specialization*. Sparta's citizens were mostly forbidden to practise manual crafts – except that of the soldier. In soldierly qualities they were trained from childhood, and they had a lifelong training in loyal cohesion with their fellow citizens. This distinguished them, perhaps until the rise of Thebes in the fourth century, from every other Greek state which we know.³ It did not make them soldiers-and-nothing-else. Aristocratic fun and games lived on. Drunken dancing, as shown on the Laconian vases of the sixth century, was replaced by sober, sometimes warlike, dancing. Drunken *symposia* were replaced by sober *syssitia*. Erotic whipping turned into tests of manly endurance. But Sparta's overarching specialism consisted of systematically avoiding oppression by aristocrats, or conquest by helots and foreigners. The military aspect of Spartan life, necessary as *part* of that specialism, did not become obsessive militarism. But it gave Sparta enough of a military edge for almost two centuries to be *the* great land power of Greece.

NOTES

- 1 Compare holiday trips to remote parts of the earth, involving days of confinement in austere if not fearful airports and planes. On a calculus of physical pleasure, such behaviour may not be easily explained. But as a search for high status, going to the Seychelles or the Bahamas is less problematic.
- 2 Nancy Boudighaghen (2017) argues convincingly that in the decades preceding Thermopylai there was no special disgrace for a Spartan force in retreating from a bad military situation.
- 3 Argos in 418, very likely in a half-hearted imitation of Sparta, had 1000 picked men who had been ‘trained as soldiers over a long period at the state’s expense’: Thuc. 5.67.2.

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